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Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

226th Meeting

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New York

Chairman: Mr. Ka (Senegal)

The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): Today the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is holding a solemn meeting to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 32/40 (B) of 2 December 1977.

I am honoured and pleased to welcome His Excellency Mr. Razali Ismail, President of the General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. Nugroho Wisnumurti, President of the Security Council, His Excellency Mr. Herman Leonard de Silva, Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, His Excellency Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, Head of the Political Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization, representative of Palestine, and Mr. Alvaro de Soto, Assistant Secretary-General in the Department of Political Affairs.

I would also like to welcome representatives of Member States and intergovernmental organizations, as well as representatives of non-governmental organizations, members of the press and all others who have accepted the Committee's invitation to participate in this commemoration.

I would now like to invite everyone present to stand and observe a minute of silence in memory of all of those who have given their lives for the cause of the Palestinian people and for the return of peace in the region.

The participants observed a minute of silence.

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I should now like to make a statement on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome all participants, who are here to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. We are very honoured to have numerous eminent guests at this meeting. For the past 18 years, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 32/40 B, has traditionally held a special meeting on 29 November to express its solidarity.

Since the creation of the Committee, the United Nations, its organs, its agencies and its Secretary-General have made praiseworthy efforts, with the international community, to establish the peace, justice and stability of which the Palestinian people and the entire Middle East region have long been deprived.

The resumption of the peace process at the beginning of 1996 gave hope that the historic reconciliation between the Palestinians and the Israelis had firmly begun and would mark a new era of peace and coexistence in dignity among the peoples of the region. The partial redeployment



of the Israeli forces from certain sectors of the West Bank, the expansion of the responsibilities of the Palestinian Authority and the first elections to the Legislative Council and the presidency of the Authority seemed to be encouraging milestones along this new path.

Unfortunately, several months later, we are forced to note, with all of those who have expressed their serious concern as to the future of the peace process, that with the resurgence of violence in the region and the measures taken by the new Israeli Government, a climate of mistrust has taken hold, exacerbating tensions and preparing the ground for the destructive actions of extremists. The prolonged and sometimes complete closure of the West Bank and Gaza since February 1996, the isolation of the Arab quarter of Jerusalem, the resumed policy of confiscating Arab lands, the creation and expansion of settlements, the acts of violence by often armed settlers, the continuing precariousness of communications between the autonomous regions, the refusal to free thousands of Palestinian prisoners, the delay in the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Hebron and from other sectors of the West Bank have, without a doubt, been serious violations of the spirit and letter of the agreements made between the parties.

It was in this strained context that the decision was taken by the Government to open a new access to the tunnel of archaeological interest situated near the western wall of Al-Haram al-Sharif in occupied East Jerusalem. This was the spark that ignited violent confrontations, causing numerous deaths and wounding many Palestinians and Israeli soldiers.

This worsening of the situation gave rise to great concern within the international community. It is urgent that everything be done in order to avoid any resumption of tension, which can only seriously compromise the peace process. Efforts aimed at overcoming this crisis and resuming negotiations between the parties, as encouraged by the Security Council in its resolution 1073 (1996) of 28 September 1996, were of course welcome.

The international community has clearly affirmed that the Israeli-Palestinian agreements are to be implemented comprehensively within the prescribed time-frame, beginning with the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Hebron and the opening up of the Palestinian territories. A climate of partnership, equality and mutual trust must be restored without delay; this is a precondition for any progress in the peace process. We earnestly hope that Israel will comply with Security Council resolution 1073 (1996), that it will put a halt to all activities that have led to a

worsening of the situation and had a negative impact on the peace process, and that it will ensure the security and the protection of the Palestinian people.

It is very difficult for peace and stability to take root when people continue to live in poverty and in want. For peace to thrive, it must also lead to the improvement of the daily standards of living of the people concerned. That will ensure a better future.

For several years, the Committee has encouraged the international community to provide assistance to the Palestinian people, who are facing a difficult life under occupation and extremely precarious living conditions. The Palestinian Authority, with the assistance of the donor community and the United Nations, has courageously sought to set up effective institutions and administration and appropriate conditions in order to improve the quality of life of the Palestinian people.

The Committee would particularly like to highlight the special role played by the Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who has devoted a great deal of his time and effort to improving the living conditions of the Palestinian people and laying the foundation for a viable national economy. It is of great importance that the activity of the United Nations and the support of the international donor community continue and grow in order to establish peace on a solid footing.

To conclude, I would once again like to recall that the General Assembly has reaffirmed on numerous occasions that the United Nations has an ongoing responsibility in the Palestinian question until that issue has been resolved satisfactorily in all its aspects in accordance with international law. As a General Assembly body entrusted with the question of Palestine, the Committee will spare no effort to encourage and promote the effective implementation of the agreements entered into by the parties. It is committed to solving the question of Palestine on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), ensuring the right of Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights, in particular their right to self-determination and to the creation of a State. The Committee is firmly convinced that there is no peaceful alternative to the process of reconciliation and peace which the parties have courageously committed themselves. It is the duty of the Committee, the international community and all of us to support and encourage this process so that the Middle East, the crossroads of history and of the world, can once again become an area of peace and opportunity for all.

I now have the pleasure of calling on the President of the General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. Razali Ismail.

Mr. Razali (Malaysia), President of the General Assembly: Traditionally, the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People has provided an opportunity for the international community to renew its pledge of support for the aspirations and inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. This year the 29 November observance should be an occasion to denounce the forces that threaten to derail the long-awaited peace accord in the Middle East.

The question of Palestine remains the most intractable conflict situation in the history of the United Nations. Less than five years ago, historic decisions were taken by courageous and far-sighted leaders of Palestine and of Israel. Encouraged and supported by powers from outside, these leaders overcame their fear of committing themselves to a common destiny and took decisions to agree on mutually reinforcing steps that would lead to a common programme and joint endeavours in the future.

The prospect of a just and durable peace for the peoples of the Middle East, at that point an exciting notion, is now seriously at risk because of a wafer-thin majority that seeks to build a "secure" future on foundations of military superiority and the antagonisms of the past.

The United Nations should be a vocal critic of those who want to derail the peace accord. There are milestone United Nations resolutions that recognize the right of the Palestinian people to manifest their aspirations. The Palestinians are arguably the final group of people whose struggle for a homeland continues to be denied, though they came tantalizingly close with the peace accord. The international community must continue to support the land-for-peace initiative, using Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

In this context, the United Nations should lend every authority to ensure that radicalism in power does not lead to the reemergence of the politics of desperation. Security in the region as a whole is undermined by reneging on important agreements. Seeking recourse in extremism, by any side, will put an end to all hopes of a common future.

Young people from all countries of the region have never known and never benefited from the fruits of peace and stability. This tragedy and injustice is compounded when we consider the reservoir of skilled people who are ready and willing to assist in the process of development,

which allows social justice and human security to grow and flourish. The region deserves to benefit from such rehabilitation processes and from governance that takes full account of the needs and choices of all sectors of society.

Palestinians had accepted the peace accord despite residual concerns, in the hope that peace would usher in such a development. They had believed that the accord would help initially mitigate and eventually overcome the adverse impact of almost five decades of fighting, which had destroyed much of the infrastructure in Palestine and the occupied territories.

The viability of a Palestinian homeland is now being progressively diminished by policies of continued closure, repression and restricted movement that deny the rights of the Palestinian people. This in turn affects the much-expected inflow of the financial and other resources so necessary for development, which have not materialized. Even though \$2.4 billion had been pledged over a period of five years following the Oslo peace accord, these commitments are at risk so long as Palestinian territory remains virtually under siege. Regrettably, there are huge gaps between the pledges made and the actual amount received. This non-fulfilment in itself weakens the peace process.

Meanwhile, the human rights situation in the occupied territories continues to deteriorate. Palestinians are being intimidated and physically abused. The expansion of illegal settlements, the delay in the redeployment of troops from the West Bank city of Hebron and the decision to open an entrance to a tunnel in the vicinity of East Jerusalem have led to an escalation of violence. Steps from a Government bent on taking action in defiance of international opinion erode the confidence and trust so necessary for peace to prevail. They also underline the ineffectiveness of the United Nations in defending the integrity of international accords. Given one-sided power backing, such flagrant abuse of international agreements has elicited little outrage, much less punitive response.

Without doubt, the question of Jerusalem remains the crux of the efforts for lasting peace. Given its critical importance, any attempt to change its status cannot be condoned by the international community. The relevant United Nations resolutions on this issue must be complied with. The status of Jerusalem, that holy city to some of the major religions of the world, can only be resolved in the final process of peace shared by all in the region, and not by unilateral actions.

As President of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly, I need to reiterate that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until that question is resolved in fairness and honour for all, and in accordance with the principles of the Charter and the relevant United Nations resolutions. I believe it is my duty to look in expectation at those who are the architects of and party to the Madrid and Oslo accords and to urge them to ensure that all commitments solemnly entered into are being fulfilled.

Peace must be given a chance to take root and flourish, but peace can be meaningful and durable only if the Palestinians are part of that peace. The international community must not only stand ready to help with words of encouragement, but must be ready to take substantive action to ensure that peace, justice and stability prevail. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People can do much to contribute to the Palestinian cause by bolstering efforts to promote the decisions of the United Nations regarding the question of Palestine. The Committee must make itself ready to continue to serve Palestinians in all circumstances, perhaps more so than before.

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I now have the honour to call on His Excellency Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Secretary-General of the United Nations.

The Secretary-General: This annual commemorative event provides an opportunity to remind the international community that the question of Palestine, which is at the centre of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East, remains unresolved despite the many efforts that have been made over the years, and despite the peace process which began in Madrid in 1991. This issue is very close to my heart and I have devoted and will continue to devote my best efforts to contribute to the achievement of a comprehensive and just peace in the region.

I have paid tribute to the leaders of Israel and of the Palestine Liberation Organization for their resolve and dedication in moving towards historical reconciliation and in reaching agreements of crucial importance for future peaceful coexistence. The establishment of an elected Palestinian administration over Gaza and parts of the West Bank earlier this year was a significant advance along this road. It is now of the utmost importance not to dissipate those achievements, but to build on them in order to fulfil the hopes of all the peoples of the region for a future of peace and security.

The resumption of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations has been an encouraging development. It is essential that the parties abide by agreements already reached and make tangible progress towards a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). But the proposed construction of new settlements in the West Bank and Gaza poses a serious threat to the peace process. The United Nations continues to attach the utmost importance to promotion of Palestinian social and economic development. This is essential in order to ease the impact of the closures, to improve living conditions and to create solid foundations for the achievement of a lasting peace. The transfer of the headquarters of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) from Vienna to Gaza, which took place in July, should provide new momentum towards meeting United Nations development objectives in support of the Palestinian economy.

However, enormous challenges remain and some of our efforts have suffered setbacks during the year in the light of deteriorating conditions on the ground. I believe that the international community can and should go further. In this context, the serious financial situation faced by UNRWA requires new efforts by all concerned to ensure that the quality and level of services for Palestinian refugees can be maintained as an essential contribution to stability in the area. I wish to thank Mr. Peter Hansen of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs for his continuous efforts in this respect.

I would like to take this opportunity to renew once again the firm commitment of the United Nations in support of the peace process. The programmes and agencies of the United Nations system will continue to provide all possible expertise and assistance in humanitarian relief and in the field of economic and social development in order to contribute to the creation of the necessary conditions for peace. In conclusion, I should like to extend my thanks to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and to its Chairman.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

I pay tribute to the Palestinian people and I salute the leadership of the Palestinian people.

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I would like to thank His Excellency Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Secretary-General of the United Nations, for his inspiring statement, for all his efforts to promote a comprehensive,

just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, and for the support he has always lent to the Committee in its work. Now I have the honour of calling on His Excellency Mr. Nugroho Wisnumurti, President of the Security Council.

Mr. Wisnumurti (Indonesia), President of the Security Council: Allow me at the outset to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the kind invitation extended to me, in my capacity as President of the Security Council for the month of November, to participate in this special meeting held to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Indeed, it gives me much pleasure to join in this annual event, in which the international community shows its solidarity with the Palestinian people as well as its enduring commitment to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in accordance with United Nations resolutions.

Indeed, it gives me much pleasure that the observance of this Day has always been an important symbolic act of solidarity with a people striving for the attainment of its legitimate rights. It is also a manifestation of the importance attached to the need to bring about the long-awaited resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which has been on the United Nations agenda since 1947.

For decades, the Security Council has been associated with efforts aimed at achieving a solution to this complex problem. On a number of occasions, the Council has been called upon to consider various aspects of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, most recently on 27 September 1996 in a formal meeting with the participation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of a number of countries. There has always been a recognition in the Council that resolving this conflict is the key to the attainment of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

As the President of the Security Council, I am pleased to note the progress made in recent years by the parties to the Middle East peace process launched at Madrid in 1991. The five-year-old negotiating process has its foundations in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Regrettably, the road to peace has been hard and often tragic. Despite the numerous setbacks, the Council emphasizes the urgent need to implement the agreements reached so far. In this context, members of the Council

attach great importance to the efforts of the parties to continue their negotiations. Allow me to emphasize that the Council is aware of the problems at hand and calls upon the parties to move forward along the road to peace. It is gratifying to note that the difficulties on the ground and in the negotiations notwithstanding, the parties remain fully committed to overcoming the existing roadblocks and achieving progress in an atmosphere of mutual trust and confidence.

As the Palestinian people are going through a difficult period of transition, they need much assistance in many walks of its day-to-day life. In this regard, the Council welcomes and would like to further encourage the multifaceted assistance extended to the Palestinian people by the international donor community. We also appreciate the continued assistance provided by organizations, agencies and programmes of the United Nations family.

On behalf of the Security Council, allow me to assure the Committee that, guided by its responsibilities under the Charter, the Council will spare no effort to see to it that a comprehensive, just and lasting peace is brought to the region of the Middle East for the benefit of all parties concerned, including the Palestinian people.

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I now call on Mr. Nasser Al-Kidwa, Permanent Observer of Palestine, who will read out a message from His Excellency Mr. Yasser Arafat.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*interpretation from Arabic*): It is a great honour for me to read out a message from Mr. Yasser Arafat, President of the State of Palestine, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and President of the Palestinian National Authority.

"On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, it gives me pleasure to convey to the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People the warmest greetings and deepest gratitude and appreciation for all their efforts and activities in support of our people and its just and legitimate struggle to regain and to exercise its inalienable rights.

"It also gives me pleasure to convey my warm gratitude and deep appreciation to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, for the positions he has taken and for his constant and

devoted endeavours to advance the cause of the Palestinian people and to support its strategic choice with regard to the achievement of a just and comprehensive peace in our region. Such a peace will secure the inalienable right of our people to enjoy freedom and independence and to establish an independent Palestinian State, and it will realize the aspirations of the peoples of the region for security, stability and prosperity.

"On behalf of the Palestinian people, I express the warmest gratitude to all present today and to all States and peoples that believe in freedom, peace and the justice of our people's cause, that have always sided with truth and justice, that have supported our people and its legitimate struggle for freedom and independence, and that are today renewing their support for and solidarity with the Palestinian people.

"This year's commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity comes at a time of difficult circumstances, major challenges and enormous problems for the Palestinian people as it proceeds with the building and reconstruction of its homeland, the establishment of key institutions and infrastructure and the rebuilding of a national economy that has been devastated by the continued Israeli occupation of its territory. Our people also maintains its commitment to the peace process, which is encountering major obstacles and is beset by enormous dangers because of the ongoing Israeli Government policy of intransigence, procrastination and circumvention, of playing for time, of non-compliance with deadlines established by agreements already concluded, and of deliberately delaying the implementation of pending provisions of the Interim Agreement, primarily those concerning the redeployment of Israeli forces in Hebron.

"The Israeli Government continues to impose a policy of *faits accomplis* in Jerusalem, where a wide-ranging campaign of systematic judaization and settlement is under way, and to maintain the closures and an economic embargo of our people on flimsy security-related pretexts. This has caused enormous losses to our national economy and has disrupted the development plans we had begun to implement. The Israeli Government has also resumed its encouragement of large-scale settlement activity throughout the Palestinian territories in flagrant violation of international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions and agreements already concluded.

The continued pursuit of this planned settlement policy is likely to wreck the peace process in its entirety and destroy the hopes to which it had given rise.

"Our commitment to peace is a strategic choice for the Palestinian people made out of a genuine conviction that peace in the region will ensure security, stability and prosperity, and that it will thereby be possible for cooperation and peaceful coexistence to endure and to take root.

"The entire world is urged to make further efforts to induce the Government of Israel to comply, without delay or procrastination, with the agreements it has already signed so that the peace process may continue, so that the Palestinian people may complete the process of ending the Israeli occupation of its territory and its Holy Places, and so that it may regain and exercise its inalienable national rights, including the right to return, to exercise self-determination and to establish an independent State with its capital at Jerusalem.

"Once again, I reiterate our greetings of friendship and respect to all participants on this International Day of Solidarity with our people, the occasion on which the international community renews its solidarity with and support for the continuing struggle of our people to achieve the lofty national goals of freedom, independence and sovereignty on the soil of its homeland, Palestine."

The Chairman (interpretation from French): I thank his Excellency Mr. Nasser Al-Kidwa, and ask him to convey our thanks to His Excellency Mr. Yasser Arafat, President of the Palestinian Authority, for his important message. I should like to assure President Yasser Arafat and, through him, the Palestinian people, of the firm determination of the Committee to continue and to intensify its efforts, within the framework of its mandate, to contribute to finding a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, in order to enable the Palestinian people to exercise, as soon as possible, their inalienable national rights.

On behalf of the Committee I should like to thank Their Excellencies the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General, the President of the Security Council and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements. I thank them on my own behalf and on behalf of members of the Committee for taking part in the first half of our meeting.

I shall now suspend the meeting for a few minutes, to allow some of our invited guests to leave the Conference Room.

The meeting was suspended at 11.25 a.m. and resumed at 11.30 a.m.

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I have the pleasure of calling on His Excellency Mr. Herman Leonard de Silva, Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

Mr. De Silva (Sri Lanka), Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories: On behalf of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, and on my own behalf, I have the honour to convey this message on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

The signing on 28 September 1995 in Washington, D.C., of the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip — the so-called Oslo II agreement — and the elections for the Palestinian Council and for the chairmanship of the Palestinian Authority on 21 January 1996 were historic events within the framework of the peace process in the Middle East, and were followed by the withdrawal of the Israeli army from the West Bank cities of Jenin, Tulkarm, Nablus, Kalkiliya, Bethlehem and Ramallah. Hebron is an exception, as withdrawal began there in October 1995. As was the case with the earlier Washington and Cairo agreements of 1993 and 1994, the signing of the Oslo II accord also engendered great expectations and hope among the population of the occupied territories and the international community that a new era of peace, security and hope for the people of the Middle East would be ushered in, enabling them to live in harmony, dignity and mutual respect. Unfortunately, the recent policies implemented by the newly elected Israeli Government and the developments leading to an unprecedented escalation of violence that have taken place in the occupied territories over the past weeks, have all but dashed the hopes of both Palestinians and the international community regarding the continuation of the peace process.

The Government of Israel has continued to withhold its cooperation from the Special Committee, persistently

denying it access to the occupied territories covered by its mandate. This situation has not altered since the creation of the Special Committee in 1968. In keeping with past practice, and despite the constraints that I have cited, the Special Committee has nevertheless tried to depict the situation of human rights in the occupied territories in a faithful and comprehensive manner. Its findings are contained in the Special Committee's twenty-eighth report to the General Assembly. In carrying out its mandate, the Special Committee has tried to assess whether the signing of the Oslo II agreement has had any positive effects on the enjoyment of human rights by Palestinians and other Arabs of the occupied territories. On the basis of the information received, the Committee has concluded that the human rights situation in the occupied territories has not improved and has even deteriorated further in numerous ways, and that it remains a matter of very serious concern.

Among the principal causes of the deterioration of the human rights situation in the occupied territories has been the virtually hermetic closure of the territories since 25 February 1996. This was imposed in the wake of suicide bomb attacks in Israel and amounts to collective punishment of the population. The closure has had disastrous consequences for the economy of the occupied territories and has led to a significant decline in the economic and social conditions of their inhabitants. For the first time, a total internal closure of the West Bank has been implemented, locking its inhabitants inside their localities. The closure has had particularly disastrous consequences for the health of the inhabitants of the occupied territories, and more than 10 people have died as a result of not having access to well-equipped health institutions in their areas. It has also had serious negative effects on freedom of education and worship. The Special Committee has continued to pay particular attention to the situation of some 3,500 Palestinian prisoners who, in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, are being held in detention facilities within Israel. No new releases of prisoners, whose conditions of detention are reported to have deteriorated further, have taken place since January 1996. Since the imposition of the closure, Palestinian detainees have been cut off from their families and also, in numerous cases, from their lawyers.

The Special Committee is deeply concerned at the recent decision of the Israeli High Court of Justice to allow the use by the General Security Service of increased physical pressure during the interrogation of detainees — such as violent shaking, which may cause lethal brain haemorrhages — as this amounts to torture. Particularly

disquieting is the fact that, should the detainees die, the interrogators would enjoy immunity.

The Special Committee has noted an increase in the number of house demolitions in East Jerusalem, where, on 27 August 1996, for the first time in the old part of the town, a community centre was demolished. In addition, the new policy of restrictions regarding eligibility for residency status in Jerusalem has made the situation of its Arab population even more precarious. The most disquieting new policy of the recently elected Israeli Government, posing the biggest threat to the peace process, is the decision to lift the freeze on the construction of settlements. It has been reported that in the 1997 Israeli Government budget, the sum allocated for settlements will be doubled. The tensions generated by the expansion of settlements and the construction of tunnels and bypass roads, which continue unabated, are aggravated further by the behaviour of settlers, which has even involved the killing of Palestinian children. The attitude of the Israeli law enforcement authorities with regard to settlers who commit offences continues to be lenient.

The Special Committee has continued to monitor closely the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan, and is concerned by the most recent news concerning the construction of 900 new housing units there. The Special Committee wishes to recall the position taken by the General Assembly and the Security Council that the annexation by Israel of the occupied Syrian Arab Golan is illegal, and therefore null and void, and hopes that the negotiations concerning the Golan within the Middle East peace process will be resumed in the near future.

The subject that is the source of the greatest concern and anxiety to the members of the Special Committee is, however, the escalation of violence between Israelis and Palestinians, unprecedented since the beginning of the peace process, which was caused by the opening by the Israeli authorities of the so-called Western Wall tunnel beneath the Temple Mount, in the immediate vicinity of Islam's third-holiest shrine. The excessive force used by the Israeli army to quell the demonstrations in protest against the opening of the tunnel included the use of ammunition fired from automatic weapons and from helicopter gunships, and the involvement of snipers. A total of 60 Palestinians, including 10 children, and 15 Israelis were killed during the riot or died as a result of the clashes, and more than 1,000 people were reportedly injured.

The Special Committee is of the opinion that it is vital that a dialogue between the parties be maintained and that

the peace process continue. Deteriorating living conditions and the stalemate in the peace process could contribute to producing an environment conducive to further unrest. Both parties should therefore respect the spirit and the letter of the Oslo accords and show renewed commitment to the peace process through an immediate resumption of the peace talks. The frustration and despair of Palestinians has further eroded their trust in the peace process. People feel bitterness and pain over the hunger and poverty that have ensued, and fear Israeli excesses. The current lack of momentum in the peace process, which appears to have led to a stalemate, can only erode further the trust of people that tangible progress can be achieved in peace talks. Only a just peace settlement can bring lasting peace to the region. All parties concerned must therefore work together to safeguard the peace effort and develop confidence-building measures in order to maintain the momentum of the peace process.

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I thank His Excellency Mr. Herman Leonard de Silva for his important statement.

It is now my pleasure to call on His Excellency Mr. Andelfo García, representative of the President of Colombia, to read out a message from His Excellency the President of Colombia in his capacity as Chairman of the Eleventh Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Mr. García (Colombia) (*interpretation from Spanish*): I have the honour to read out a message from the President of the Republic of Colombia, Mr. Ernesto Samper Pizano, in his capacity as Chairman of the Eleventh Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement, on the occasion of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. It is as follows:

"The observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is of special significance to the members of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. Throughout its history, our Movement has maintained unwavering solidarity with the Palestinian people and its legitimate aspirations to self-determination. Today, despite the undeniable progress that has been made over the past few years, we are greatly concerned about developments, as the movement towards full independence and self-determination is now at a critical stage. This means that the observance of this Day is of special importance.

"The countries of the Non-Aligned Movement are hopeful about the talks now under way between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority. We believe that dialogue should produce concrete results relating to implementation of the agreements, demonstrating the real commitment of the parties to the peace process. Withdrawal by the Israeli Government from Hebron is urgent if progress is to be made towards a final peace settlement, including on the issues of the status of Jerusalem, settlements and refugees. The perception that the goal of the negotiations is indeed feasible is the best guarantee of peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

"At this delicate moment in the history of the Palestinian people, I should like to reiterate the view of the Movement of Non-Aligned countries on this matter, which is of great concern to us. At their Eleventh Conference, held at Cartagena, the Heads of State or Government of the Movement attached special importance to the question of Palestine. At Cartagena we expressed our full support for the legitimate struggle of the brave Palestinian people to ensure respect for their inalienable right to self-determination and independence, and we repeated our demand that Israel withdraw from all occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories, including Jerusalem.

"We also said that we believe that the responsibility of the United Nations in this area must continue until the Palestinian people exercise their inalienable right to self-determination, until an independent and sovereign State is established in their national territory, and until the problem of refugees is resolved, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations. At Cartagena we also expressed regret over Israel's decision to confiscate Palestinian property and land in Jerusalem and at attempts to change the religious and historic status of the Holy City. In this connection, we endorsed all Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on Jerusalem, and stated that we regarded as null and void any Israeli actions that run counter to those resolutions. We also called for the full and comprehensive implementation of the accords, in particular the provisions of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 465 (1980) and 478 (1980), and we emphasized the need for the machinery established by the General Assembly to deal with the question of Palestine to continue to function effectively.

"We expressed our support for the appeal made by the Jerusalem Committee, which met in Ifrane, Morocco, in January 1996, to the Security Council, and in particular to the two sponsors of the peace conference, to the effect that measures needed be taken to make Israel put an end to the further settlement and judaization of the Holy City of Jerusalem, as well as to other geographical or demographic change there. We also called for implementation of the agreements and accords relating to the preservation of Palestinian institutions and the Islamic and Christian holy places in the Holy City of Jerusalem, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

"We believe that provisions relating to the establishment of interim Palestinian self-government should be quickly expanded so that the Declaration of Principles can be applied as quickly as possible to all the occupied territories, with a view to the effective exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the establishment of a Palestinian State. In this context, we welcomed the conclusion of the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which was reached at Taba, Egypt, and signed in Washington by President Arafat and the former Prime Minister of Israel. We regard that as a major essential step towards the exercise of the national rights of the Palestinian people. We also expressed our hope for further vigorous action with a view to completing the Israeli withdrawal from all the Arab territories occupied in 1967 and to ensuring that complete peace and prosperity for all prevails throughout the region.

"At the historic Cartagena meeting we expressed our agreement with the Secretary-General that to maintain support for the Declaration of Principles and the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, it is essential to promote economic and social development in the occupied Palestinian territories. In that connection, we appealed to those who participated in the Conference to Support Middle East Peace, which was held in Washington on 1 October 1993, that the pledged assistance be made available, as it is essential to the establishment of peace.

"On 25 September 1996, Foreign Ministers of the Movement of Non-Aligned countries met in New York in connection with the fifty-first session of the General Assembly, and to commemorate the thirty-

fifth anniversary of the founding of the Movement. In their joint communiqué, the

'Foreign Ministers and Heads of delegations expressed their concern over the worsening of the situation in the region, in particular the difficulties encountered in the peace process as a result of Israel's refusal to implement the agreements that had been arrived at. They affirmed their unconditional support for the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people to secure their inalienable rights to self-determination and independence, and they reiterated their demand that Israel withdraw completely from all the Palestinian and other occupied Arab territories, including Jerusalem, southern Lebanon, the western Bekaa and the Syrian Golan'.

"The Movement of Non-Aligned countries thereby reaffirmed its full, traditional and unequivocal support for the Palestinian people in the hope that their just aspirations would soon be met as a result of their unwavering and exemplary struggle, endorsed by our Movement, whose support I am pleased to renew on this important Day. In observing this anniversary once again, our Movement expresses its very sincere hope that the current negotiations will produce the results that all of us hope for, and allow for the restoration of complete peace and prosperity for all throughout the region of the Middle East.

"In conclusion, I should like to express my appreciation for the enormous input made by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to the cause of Palestine, and extend to it our sincere congratulations."

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I thank His Excellency Mr. Andelfo García, and ask him to extend to His Excellency the President of Colombia the sincere thanks of the Committee for his important message. I am now pleased to call on Her Excellency Mrs. Mahawa Bangoura Camara, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Guinea, who will read out a message from His Excellency General Lansana Conté, the President of Guinea.

Mrs. Camara (Guinea) (*interpretation from French*): I am very pleased to speak as we commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, at a time when my country is chairing the Conference of

Foreign Ministers of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. My country, Guinea, which has had the honour of being a member of this Committee since its inception, would like to recall that the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) was founded following violations carried out against the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the third *kiblah* of our religion. This demonstrates the importance that is attached to the support of the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people — support that is equal to the challenges that the Islamic *Ummah* must meet in order to reclaim and safeguard all the components of its cultural heritage. In that context, I have the honour to read out a message addressed to the Committee by General Lansana Conté, President of the Republic of Guinea, in commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the message reads as follows:

"As the international community prepares to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I am duty-bound, on behalf of the people and the Government of Guinea, to extend my sincerest congratulations on the extremely positive role that the Committee continues to play in restoring the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. This matter goes to the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Government of Guinea welcomes the positive events that have taken place in the Middle East, and reaffirms its full support for the efforts carried out at all levels aimed at finding a comprehensive and just settlement to the Palestinian problem and to the Arab-Israeli conflict, in accordance with decisions and resolutions of the United Nations and the OIC.

"I should like to say that, as a member of this Committee since its inception, my country has committed itself to these noble objectives of peace, and we are always prepared to make our modest contribution to ensure the implementation of these goals."

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I thank Her Excellency Ambassador Camara, and ask her to convey to His Excellency the President of Guinea the regards and sincere thanks of our Committee for his important message.

I now call on His Excellency Mr. Said Kamal, Under-Secretary-General for Palestinian Affairs of the League of Arab States, who will read a message from His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Esmat Abdel-Meguid, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Kamal (League of Arab States) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I should like to extend to you, Mr. Chairman, and, through you, to all members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the greetings of His Excellency Mr. Esmat Abdel-Meguid. He has also asked me to express his support for the Committee and to stress the need for it to continue until a just peace has been established in the Middle East. The League of Arab States accords a high priority to the question of Palestine in the context of its daily work. I wish to convey the support of the secretariat of the League of Arab States to His Excellency Mr. Faruk Kaddoumi, Foreign Minister of the State of Palestine and, through him, to the President of Palestine, Mr. Yasser Arafat, and to the Palestinian people in their just struggle, which will continue until they have achieved their full rights. Mr. Abdel-Meguid's statement reads as follows:

"It gives me great pleasure to transmit this message today on behalf of the secretariat of the League of Arab States on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, held in accordance with General Assembly resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977. That resolution gave international recognition to the justice of the struggle of the Palestinian Arab people, and acknowledged the grave injustice that had been inflicted upon them and the responsibility of the international community for the tragic situation of the struggling, resolute Palestinian people, both inside and outside the Palestinian territories.

"On behalf of the Secretariat of the League of Arab States, and on my own behalf, I should also like to express to the Committee great appreciation for the role that it has played since its establishment under General Assembly resolution 3376 (XXX) of 10 November 1975. Through that role, the Committee has contributed to keeping the question of Palestine at the forefront of United Nations concerns by defending the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people, foremost among which are its rights to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent State on its national territory. By impressing these rights on the international conscience and expanding the scope of international support for the struggle of the Palestinian people, it has become impossible to envisage a solution to the problem of the Middle East that does not take into account their rights and aspirations.

"This year, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People assumes special importance, as the peace process is witnessing a grave setback five years after being launched. Significant achievements have been made on a long, promising road. But it will be essential to maintain solidarity and pool efforts if a just and comprehensive peace is to be achieved and a sovereign Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital is to be established. The setback in the peace process is a result of the current policies of the Israeli Government, which is reneging on its commitments and pledges and on the accords arrived at in the context of the peace process. This has squandered hope, and is threatening to undermine the peace process in the region.

"The clearest evidence of that fact are the developments in negotiations on the redeployment of forces from Hebron, which was supposed to have taken place in March. In these negotiations, the Israeli Government is insisting on changing the terms of the agreement under the pretext of making security arrangements for the 400 settlers who live in the midst of the 120,000 Palestinians in Hebron. This constitutes a grave precedent that would allow all the agreements concluded with Israel to be reopened, and would thereby take negotiations back to the starting point, and return the region to the cycle of tension and violence. Other examples are the continued imposition by Israel of the stifling embargo on the Palestinian territories, with the attendant tragedies now suffered by the Palestinians within the territories. The situation there is verging on the explosive, and Palestinians have begun losing faith in the peace process and in the seriousness of the other party in seeking peace. The climate of bitterness and distrust generated by Israeli policies has now spread to all Palestinian and Arab circles.

"The bloody events that caused the death or injury of scores of Palestinians and Israelis, and which broke out after the opening by the current Israeli Government of a tunnel under the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, are the most telling indication of what would happen if that Government insisted on reneging on the agreements concluded, and continued its practices aimed at changing the Arab character and legal status of Jerusalem and riding roughshod over all international resolutions relating to Jerusalem. Such resolutions consider all Israeli actions aimed at changing the Arab and Islamic character of Jerusalem to be null and void, because Jerusalem is under

occupation, and falls within the provisions of Security Council resolution 242 (1967). Equally serious is the decision of the current Israeli Government to revoke the decision on a settlement freeze that had been taken by the previous Government, defying the norms of international law and the will of the international community, which views the settlements as an obstacle to peace that must be dismantled.

"The policies of the current Israeli Government have led to conditions in the region becoming so serious that they require the pooling of the efforts of the international community, especially the United States of America and the Russian Federation — the sponsors of the peace process — and the European Union, to try to put the peace process back on track. Israel should be induced to give up these practices and stop putting obstacles in the way of the implementation of the agreements concluded with the Palestinians, and to abandon policies that will only fuel the flames of hatred, thwart the peace process and take the region back to the cycle of violence and tension.

"Fortunately, those who follow international reactions and the international community's interest in the peace process are bound to feel optimistic about the general situation with regard to protecting the peace process from the results of Israeli policies. The League of Arab States was among the foremost supporters of the peace process, even before the launch of the Madrid Conference in 1991. In September 1991, the League adopted its resolution 5092, in which it expressed support for the Arab States participating in the peace process until a just and lasting peace had been achieved. Following the Oslo accords, the Council of the League of Arab States held its one hundredth session in September 1993. It was attended by His Excellency President Arafat who explained the Israeli-Palestinian accord. At this meeting the Council issued a statement that it considered the Israeli-Palestinian accord to be a first significant step towards the achievement of the principle of land for peace, which would be supplemented with urgent steps on all tracks to ensure full Israeli withdrawal from all the occupied Arab territories, and to guarantee the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including the right of return for Palestinian refugees under the relevant United Nations resolutions.

"At the most recent Arab Summit, held in Cairo in the second half of June 1996, Arab leaders reaffirmed the commitment of Arab States to the peace process and stated that the achievement of a just and lasting peace represented a goal and a strategic choice. However, such a just and lasting peace will necessitate full withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Palestinian territories, including Arab Jerusalem, and enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their rights to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent State with Arab Jerusalem as its capital.

"The Palestinian question is the crux of the Israeli-Arab conflict, and its resolution will require full Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967 and from southern Lebanon and the Bekaa to internationally-recognized borders, in conformity with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), in accordance with the principle of land for peace, the principles agreed upon in the Madrid Conference and the assurances provided by the parties concerned.

"Most States agree with the Arab position on the need to protect the peace process from extremist Israeli policies and from all acts of extremism, irrespective of their source.

"The Committee has no doubt followed with us recent European statements expressing interest in the success of the peace process and indicating that Europe is ready to participate, alongside the United States, without rivalry or contradiction. In this regard we feel that Europe's weight in international politics, its relationships with the region and the support it provides to the peace process all justify such participation.

"In the United States arena, the Administration has shown that it has not given up on the peace process. It is awaiting post-election rearrangements to review the progress made so far and what should be done to achieve peace before it is too late.

"The recent economic conference held in Cairo was an opportunity for a large segment of the international community to express its anxiety about the possible failure of the peace process and the adverse economic and political consequences that could result. All participants concluded that political stability cannot be achieved without economic

prosperity, because seemingly political tensions are due mostly to weak economic development.

"Hence, there is no path to development or real economic cooperation without the achievement of a full peaceful settlement, especially a just settlement on the Palestinian track, which will necessarily lead to the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian State linked through relationships of equality and peaceful coexistence with neighbouring States.

"The League of Arab States has not only supported the peace process through resolutions and statements, but seeks a role in supporting the reconstruction and development of Palestine as an indispensable basis for the success and continuation of the process. Support for the reconstruction of Palestine has been on the agenda of the Council of the League of Arab States since the one hundred and second session of the Council. That Council has decided to lend support of the League secretariat in this regard. It calls upon Arab and international organizations to develop their support for the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority. Thus, we share with this Committee an interest in supporting the Palestinian economy.

"On this occasion I would like to thank the Committee for the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its efforts in this regard, especially for the seminar on building the Palestinian economy, which was held in Cairo in May 1996 and in which I had the honour to participate.

"The secretariat of the Arab League held a similar seminar in November 1995 on the reconstruction and development of Palestine, in which scores of Arab businessmen and representatives of organizations concerned with supporting the Palestinian economy participated. Several of its recommendations are now being implemented. It also held — in cooperation with United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East — a seminar in June 1996 on support for and development of Palestinian education and of the educational process for Palestinians.

"The Secretary-General of the League of Arab States and the Director-General of UNESCO signed on 22 July 1996 a cooperation agreement covering all

activities relevant to Palestine and the Palestinian people. There was also an agreement between the League secretariat and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research in Geneva to organize a series of training courses for those working in a number of Palestinian sectors. The first of these courses was held at the headquarters of the League from 6 to 12 October for 20 Palestinian trainees in the field of financial transactions and administration. Preparations are under way to hold two courses in Jordan in 1997.

"Fortunately, the current Israeli policy is facing strong opposition thanks to our efforts to support peace and development in the region and to an international and Arab position opposed to this policy, a position which enjoys the support of a large segment of the Israeli people. It will suffice here to cite the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz*, which describes Mr. Netanyahu's policy as plenty of nothing. This policy took the people overnight from the climate of peace to the climate of war, a climate which is saturated with fuel and only needs a match to start a huge fire. The Israeli people are in a plight and the Prime Minister should realize the effects of his policy, because his training period is over.

"In conclusion, I cannot but agree with these regional and international misgivings about the peace process. I hope this clear message will reach the decision-makers in Israel so that they will overcome their reluctance to proceed along the true road to peace and will give up their attempts to change the basis of the peace process from land-for-peace to security-for-peace, because peace is security. Peace and security are on one side, and the occupation of land is on the other side. Land must be exchanged for peace, if Israeli leaders truly want their people and the region to enjoy security, peace and stability."

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I thank His Excellency Mr. Said Kamal. I request him to convey to His Excellency the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States the thanks of the Committee for his important message.

I now have the pleasure to call on Mr. David Graybeal, representative of the International Coordinating Committee for Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine.

Mr. Graybeal (International Coordinating Committee for Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of

Palestine): I am honoured to speak on behalf of Donald Betz, President of the International Coordinating Committee for Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine, and Larry Ekin, Chairman of the North American Coordinating Committee for Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine. I will speak for 10 minutes on behalf of the many hundreds of non-governmental organizations around the world committed to support of the Palestinian people.

We non-governmental organizations in support of Palestine are a diverse group. To illustrate, the North American contingent alone represents more than 100 non-governmental organizations and includes the American Friends Service Committee, the Canadian Council of Churches, American Jewish Alternatives to Zionism, the Presbyterian Church USA, the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Catholic Relief Services and the Canadian Auto Workers Social Justice Fund.

Only our common commitment to the Palestinian people makes it possible for such diversity to be gathered in one cause. There are thousands of non-governmental organizations today, and we grow in number and vitality each year. Each non-governmental organization is a non-profit organization supported primarily by the money and work given by members who endorse its programme.

Generally speaking, non-governmental organizations focus on areas of need, on human rights, on the oppressed and the poor, on population issues and the natural environment. Moving across boundaries of nation, culture and class, non-governmental organizations link concerned people into communities of trust and understanding. Since communication is essential, some non-governmental organizations have delivered fax machines to Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza so that we can keep in touch. Thus, non-governmental organizations supplement and challenge the news reports communicated by the Cable News Network (CNN), by Governments and their intelligence agencies and by the general press.

Governments and non-governmental organizations have capabilities that are quite different. Governments depend upon power and authority to achieve their ends. Non-governmental organizations depend upon influence and example. Government power must be alert and unsleeping, ready to punish lest the recalcitrant slip through the loopholes. But when non-governmental organizations demonstrate their convictions with actions and words, their passion persuades and convinces others. With each new

recruit, the mission expands and moves in creative directions.

Sometimes, non-governmental organizations attempt to influence a Government. At present, some non-governmental organizations in the United States are urging their members to send to their representatives in Congress a personal check for seven dollars payable to the United Nations, to be forwarded to this address as payment for one citizen's share of the United States debt to the United Nations. That stratagem is not likely to affect the United Nations treasury greatly, but it may raise some consciousness — perhaps some irritation — in Congressional offices.

What is the difference between a non-governmental organization and a lobby? Lobbies seek their own welfare, often the welfare of the rich and privileged. Non-governmental organizations consistently seek the welfare of others: those in need.

The non-governmental organizations concerned about the well being of the Palestinian people want to express our gratitude to the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and to the Division for Palestinian Rights, not only for organizing the observance of this Day, but also for sponsoring annually our non-governmental organization symposiums on Palestine, internationally and regionally.

These symposiums have informed and inspired those in attendance. In 1992, at the international symposium in Geneva, Yasser Arafat was taking his place on the platform when Oliver Tambo from South Africa arrived unexpectedly and joined him there. The assembly erupted in joyful applause as these two leaders of oppressed peoples embraced and lifted their joined hands. It was an unforgettable moment, for it symbolized the global solidarity of peoples who suffer.

Were I to attempt to describe the work of all the non-governmental organizations committed to support of the Palestinian people, I would have to speak in generalities. Perhaps I can be forgiven for speaking about what I know at first hand, in the hope that representatives will accept my experience as being like that of many other members of non-governmental organizations. I am a minister in the United Methodist Church and Professor Emeritus of Church and Society at Drew University in nearby Madison, New Jersey. I believe that I have participated in nearly every North American Symposium on Palestine since the first one in 1984, leading workshops and participating in

writing statements. The symposiums have allowed me to hear and meet many Palestinian leaders, as well as many United States citizens with commitments like mine to the Palestinian people. Each year I have noted with sadness that the seat reserved for an official representative of the United States has remained empty, though many other nations have been present and attentive.

In May 1996, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church — the delegated governing body of the Church — met in Denver for its conference, which is held once every four years. Bishop Judith Craig read out to the conference, which represents 8 million United Methodists, the following statement, which had been hammered out over months of work:

"We cannot remain silent about Palestine while that community struggles to survive in the midst of such inhuman violations as the ongoing confiscation of Palestinian lands; the continued growth of Israeli settlement communities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem linked by bypass roads which isolate Palestinian towns and villages; the sealing and demolition of Palestinian homes; the administrative detention of men, women and minors without the right to fair trial; and the continuing imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians in Israeli prisons."

She then read out the following resolution:

"We insist that the Government of the United States should:

1. Refuse to move the United States Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem;
2. Refrain from signing 'sense of the Congress' letters which hold that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel; and
3. Deduct from Israeli loan guarantees an amount equal to all Israeli spending on settlements."

The resolution was overwhelmingly adopted. It is now operative for all United Methodists, including those in Congress and in the White House.

One morning during the General Conference the news came that Israel had attacked southern Lebanon; Palestinians and United Nations peacekeeping troops had been killed. Mia Adjali, Director of the United Methodist office for the United Nations, informed us that those United

Nations troops were Fiji islanders, almost all of them Methodists. Their Chaplain had been in Ms. Adjali's office the previous week on his way to Lebanon. As Mia communicated with us about their situation and the condition of the Palestinians, the international solidarity of our Methodist non-governmental organization connection with these Fijian troops, as well as our commitment to the Palestinian people, suddenly became very vivid for us. Randy Day, a delegate from New York, rose to move that the Conference send a delegation to the White House immediately to deliver the resolution and to express outrage at the Israeli action. A delegation of eight, including three bishops, subsequently met for an hour in the White House with Anthony Lake, Security Adviser to President Clinton, for a forceful exchange of views.

I have talked about the United Methodists, but I am confident that, if time allowed, every non-governmental organization concerned about Palestine could tell us about its actions. Together we are engaged in a wide range of strategies, ranging from hands-on services in the occupied territories to attempts to raise consciousness in Washington and other national capitals about the daily injustices to the Palestinian people. It was in the hills of Palestine that a prophet once declared:

"Let justice flow down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream". (*The Holy Bible, Amos, 5:24*)

The time for the fulfilment of that prophecy has come; it is now.

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I thank Mr. David Graybeal for his statement, and ask him to convey our thanks to the President of the Coordinating Committee for the valuable contribution that the non-governmental organizations have always made, and continue to make, to the work of the Committee.

It is now my honour to announce that the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has received messages of support and solidarity from many Heads of State or Government, Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Governments and organizations. The texts of the messages will be published in a special bulletin of the Division for Palestinian Rights, but I should like to read out the list of those who sent them.

In commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, 1996, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has received messages from the following Heads of

State: His Majesty King Norodom Sihanouk of the Kingdom of Cambodia; His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Hosni Mubarak, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt; His Excellency Mr. Soeharto, President of the Republic of Indonesia; His Excellency Mr. Nouthak Phoumsavanh, President of the Lao People's Democratic Republic; His Excellency Mr. Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León, President of Mexico; His Excellency Mr. Abdou Diouf, President of the Republic of Senegal; His Excellency Mr. Le Duc Anh, President of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam; His Highness Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar; His Excellency Mr. Maouya Ould Sid' Ahmed Taya, President of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania; Her Excellency Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka; His Excellency Mr. Cheddi Jagan, President of the Republic of Guyana; His Excellency Mr. Glafcos Clerides, President of the Republic of Cyprus; His Highness Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates; His Excellency Mr. Robert Mugabe, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe; His Excellency Mr. Leonid Kuchma, President of Ukraine; His Majesty King Hussein Bin Talal, of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan; His Excellency Mr. Liamine Zeroual, President of the Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria; His Excellency Mr. Boris Yeltsin, President of the Russian Federation; His Excellency General Lansana Conté, President of the Republic of Guinea; His Excellency Mr. Ali Abdullah Saleh, President of the Republic of Yemen; His Excellency Mr. Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Council of State and of the Council of Ministers of Cuba; His Excellency Mr. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, President of the Republic of Tunisia; His Excellency Mr. Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran; His Excellency Mr. Sam Nujoma, President of the Republic of Namibia; His Majesty King Fahd Bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud of Saudi Arabia, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques; His Excellency Mr. Fidel Ramos, President of the Republic of the Philippines; and His Excellency Mr. Yahya Jammeh, President of the Gambia.

We have received messages from the following Heads of Government: His Excellency Mr. Malik Meraj Khalid, Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan; His Excellency Mr. Banharn Silpa-Archa, Prime Minister of Thailand; His Excellency Mr. Li Peng, Prime Minister of the People's Republic of China; His Excellency Mr. Alfred Sant, Prime Minister of Malta; His Excellency Mr. H.D. Deve Gowda, Prime Minister of India; Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh; His Excellency Mr. Necmettin Erbakan, Prime

Minister of the Republic of Turkey; and His Excellency Mr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius.

We have received from the following Ministers for Foreign Affairs: His Excellency Mr. Fares Bouez, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Lebanon; His Excellency Mr. Yousef Bin Al-Alawi Bin Abdulla, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the Sultanate of Oman; His Excellency Mr. Farouk Al-Shara', Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic; His Excellency Mr. Lim Hng Kiang, Second Minister for Foreign Affairs of Singapore; His Excellency Mr. Chong Ha Yoo, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea; His Excellency Mr. Luiz Felipe Palmeira Lampreia, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Brazil; and His Excellency Mr. Yukihiko Ikeda, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan.

We have received messages from the following Governments: Argentina, Uruguay and South Africa.

We have also received a message from His Excellency Sir Wiwa Korowi, Governor-General of Papua New Guinea.

From intergovernmental organizations we have received messages from: Mr. Dick Spring, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland and Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the European Union; and His Excellency Mr. Hamid Algabid, Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

From specialized agencies, we have received a message from Mr. Federico Mayor, Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

We have received messages from the following non-governmental organizations: the Asian Committee of Solidarity with Arabs, the Association des études internationales, the Association of Antifascists and Victims of Nazism in Israel, Federación de Entidades Americano-Arabes del Perú, Federación Palestina del Perú, Physicians for Human Rights, Arab Organization for Human Rights, Middle East Fellowship of Southern California, the Committee for Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue, Federación Palestina de Chile.

On behalf of the entire Committee, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Heads of State or Government, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Governments and the organizations I have just listed, as

well as to all participants for their constant efforts towards a comprehensive and just solution to the question of Palestine and for the support they have always given to the objectives and activities of the Committee.

The statements that we have heard this morning and the messages of solidarity that we have received today once again demonstrate the determination of the international community to make progress towards the establishment of peace in the Middle East through the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, in conformity with United Nations resolutions and international law. I can promise that all members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People will spare no effort in the achievement of these objectives.

I now call on His Excellency Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, Head of the Political Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine Liberation Organization) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I am pleased to extend my gratitude to you, Sir, and to the other members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. We thank you for your ceaseless efforts in support of the Palestinian cause.

We in the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) appreciate the expressions of solidarity which we have heard this morning in support of Palestine from the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General, the President of the Security Council, the Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the League of Arab States and representatives of non-governmental organizations. We are grateful also for the messages submitted by Heads of State or Government and Foreign Ministers of friendly countries.

This commemoration to express solidarity with the Palestinian people is proof of the constant involvement of the United Nations in the just cause of achieving peace in the Middle East. This cause has now been pursued for a half-century.

Peace can be achieved only with the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied Arab and Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. We must safeguard the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.

The United Nations will remain the appropriate forum for dealing with the Palestinian question with a view to finding a just solution through the implementation of relevant United Nations resolutions and the application of international law. The efforts of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, as well as the efforts of other organizations, are very important to ensure a just and lasting solution to this problem in order that the Middle East can live in peace and security.

In conclusion, we should like to convey our sincerest thanks and appreciation for the messages of peace and expressions of solidarity that we have received, and to which we have listened carefully. They are proof of the world's solidarity with the cause of the Palestinian people and of its support for their inalienable rights and for the creation of an independent State of their own.

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I thank His Excellency Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi for his important statement.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who made this meeting possible, in particular the staff of the Division for Palestinian Rights, the Office of Conference Services and the Department of Public Information, not forgetting all those who work behind the scenes to ensure our security.

I should like remind to you that the exhibition arranged by the office of the Permanent Observer of Palestine, under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, will be opened at 6 p.m. in the public lobby of the General Assembly building; the opening will be followed by a reception to which all are cordially invited.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.